

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3799

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RANGOON 2020

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV

SUBJ: FAREWELL CALL ON PRESIDENT NE WIN

1. SUMMARY. MY FAREWELL CALL ON PRESIDENT NE WIN JULY 11 WAS UNUSUALLY LONG (100 MINUTES) AND CORDIAL BUT SHORT ON SUBSTANCE. HE HINTED THAT HE WOULD WELCOME AN INVITATION TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES AND MEET WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. HE STRESSED THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIS PHILOSOPHY AND COMMUNISM, BUT SEEMED AS DETERMINED AS EVER TO PROTECT BURMA'S CULTURE FROM POLLUTION BY ECONOMIC PROGRESS. HE REMAINS DEEPLY SKEPTICAL OF THE THAI, BUT APPEARS WILLING TO SEEK A BASIS FOR COOPERATION AGAINST NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS. HE STILL SEEMS TO REGARD HIMSELF AS BURMA'S INDISPENSABLE MAN, WITH NO INDICATION OF WANTING TO TURN THINGS OVER TO A SUCCESSOR. HE PROBABLY HOPES EVENTUALLY TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH CHINA THROUGH HIS PERSONAL CONTACTS WITH PRC LEADERS, BUT DOES NOT SEEM OPTIMISTIC IN THE

SHORT RUN. END SUMMARY.

2. NE WIN IS STIFFER IN HIS MOVEMENTS, HE STOOPS A BIT MORE, HIS VOICE IS A LITTLE TINNIER, AND HE SEEMS TO HAVE
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TO GROPE MORE IN HIS REMINISCENCES THAN WHEN I FIRST MET HIM THREE YEARS AGO; BUT HE IS, AFTER ALL, THREE YEARS OLDER. (HE MAY ALSO HAVE HAD A HANGOVER FROM A WEDDING PARTY THE NIGHT BEFORE). HE SEEMED IN GOOD HEALTH AND SPIRITS, ABLE TO JOKE RUEFULLY ABOUT HIS PERSONAL PROBLEMS ("I MUST ADMIT IT'S EASIER TO RUN A COUNTRY THAN A FAMILY") AND STILL CONVINCED THAT HE IS BURMA'S GUIDING GENIUS, THE SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR RESEARCH

IN AGRICULTURE, AQUACULTURE, ETC. HE DID NOT, AS HE HAS SOMETIMES DONE, COMPLAIN OF THE BURDENS OF OFFICE. THESE ARE VERY INSUBSTANTIAL GROUNDS ON WHICH TO BASE ANY IMPORTANT INFERENCE, BUT, FOR WHAT THEY ARE WORTH, THEY DO SUGGEST THAT GENERAL SAN YU IS NOT BEING GROOMED FOR SUCCESSION ANY TIME SOON. (WE HAVE REPORTED THE CURRENT RUMORS THAT SAN YU MAY SOON BE PUT OUT TO PASTURE. MY MEETING WITH NE WIN PROVIDED NO CONFIRMATION OF THESE RUMORS, OF COURSE, BUT WOULD NOT BE INCONSISTENT WITH THEM. INCIDENTALLY, I HAVE HAD NO REPLY TO MY REQUEST FOR A FAREWELL CALL ON SAN YU.)

3. NE WIN ACCEPTED MY CONGRATULATIONS ON RECENT SUCCESSES IN THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKERS, AND ON THE "MAGNANIMITY" SHOWN BY THE BURMESE IN RELEASING THE CAPTURED THAI HELICOPTER AND POLICE. HOWEVER, HE REMARKED THAT HE PERSONALLY REMAINED CONVINCED THAT THE THAI HELICOPTER PILOT HAD LANDED AT THE SUA HELIPAD UNDER THE MISTAKEN IMPRESSION THE PEOPLE ON THE GROUND WERE TRAFFICKERS, AND THAT THE PILOT'S MISSION WAS TO HELP THE TRAFFICKERS EVACUATE CONTRABAND FROM THE MULE CARAVAN WHICH THE BURMESE HAD ATTACKED AND BROKEN UP JUST PREVIOUSLY. WHEN I MENTIONED THAT IT NEVERTHELESS (DESPITE SUCH SUSPICIONS) NOW SEEMED POSSIBLE FOR COLONEL TIN OO AND OTHER BURMESE TO WORK WITH CERTAIN SENIOR OFFICIALS ON THE THAI SIDE--E.G., GENERAL KRIANGSAK--TO DEVELOP A BASIS FOR COOPERATION NE WIN DID NOT DIRECTLY CHALLENGE THE POINT, BUT REMARKED "THE ONLY TRUSTWORTHY THAI OFFICIAL I HAVE EVER

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KNOWN WAS KITTIKACHORN."

4. I ASKED NE WIN ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR RELATIONS WITH CHINA; WOULD THE PRC STOP SUPPORTING THE BCP INSURGENCY, AND IF IT DID, WOULD THE USSR TAKE OVER? (COLONEL TIN OO AND MFA CHINA-HAND DAW THAN HAN ARE AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE MENTIONED THIS DANGER TO US.) NE WIN RETREATED INTO REMINISCENCES WHOSE POINT SEEMED TO BE THAT HE (NE WIN) WOULD IN TIME, BY PERSONAL DIPLOMACY, BE ABLE TO BRING THE NEW BURMESE LEADERS AROUND, THOUGH HUA KUO-FENG IS NOT YET FULLY MASTER OF HIS OWN HOUSE. NE WIN RELATED HOW HE HAD FINALLY MADE A FAST FRIEND OF LIU SHAO-CH'I, OVERCOMING LIU'S INITIAL HOSTILITY, WHICH GREW OUT OF LIU'S RELIANCE UPON ANTI-NE WIN/BCP SOURCES OF INFORMATION. NE WIN ALSO REMINISCED ABOUT HIS SUCCESS IN ESTABLISHING GOOD PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH KHRUSHCHEV.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 RANGOON 2020

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5. INTERSPERSED AMONG NE WIN'S REMINISCENCES WERE CRITICISMS OF COMMUNISM AS AN INHUMANE SYSTEM WHICH HAD LEFT THE HUMAN FACTOR OUT OF ITS CALCULATIONS. (THIS IS BSPP DOGMA ABOUT THE HARMONIZATION OF MAN AND ENVIRONMENT). ON EURO-COMMUNISM, HE SAID THE TROUBLE WAS THAT ONE COULD NOT TRUST THE COMMUNISTS TO RELINQUISH POWER THROUGH THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS, ONCE THEY HAD INSTALLED THEMSELVES. HE SAID THE BURMESE WERE NOT SUITED TO COMMUNISM, ADDING WITH A FLASH OF HUMOR, "WE DON'T LIKE TO WORK THAT HARD". COMMUNISM, HE SAID, WAS TOO INFLEXIBLE IN ITS DOCTRINE; THE COMMUNISTS ASSUMED THAT ONE COULD ADHERE RIGIDLY TO A DOCTRINE, WHEREAS EVERY DOCTRIN WAS IN CONSTANT NEED OF ADJUSTMENT TO STAY UP WITH CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES. (HERE NE WIN WAS ECHOING THE THEME OF HIS SPEECH AT LAST FALL'S EXTRAORDINARY PARTY CONGRESS, WIDELY INTERPRETED AT THE TIME AS AN OPENING OF THE DOOR TO FUNDAMENTAL REFORM. WHILE THE DOOR WAS SLAMMED SHUT AT THE THIRD CONGRESS A FEW MONTHS LATER, SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT NE WIN'S PERSONAL SYMPATHIES LIE WITH THE REFORMISTS AND AGAINST THE "HARDLINERS". I COULDN'T MAKE OUT WHETHER NE WIN WAS SOUNDING THE FLEXIBILITY THESE TO SUGGEST THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD BE A SUITABLE RECIPIENT FOR AID, OR WHAT HE HAD IN MIND. HE
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MADE DISPARAGING REMARKS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF "PROGRESS" IN THAILAND, CONTRASTING THAT COUNTRY WITH UNPOLLUTED BURMA.)

6. NE WIN MADE IT CLEAR HE WOULD WELCOME AN INVITATION

TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES AND MEET PRESIDENT CARTER. HE RECALLED HIS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT JOHNSON IN 1966, WHEN THE FORMER PRESIDENT ASKED HIM WHAT HE WOULD DO IF HE--NE WIN--HAD THE VIETNAM PROBLEM. NE WIN SAYS HE REPLIED THAT IN THE FIRST PLACE HE WOULD NEVER HAVE GOTTEN INVOLVED IN VIETNAM; HOWEVER, ONCE INVOLVED, HE RECOGNIZED THAT THE U.S. HAD BY THAT FACT ASSUMED CERTAIN COMMITMENTS AND OBLIGATIONS TOWARD OTHERS IN THE AREA WHICH MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. (NE WIN SEEMED TO ME TO BE TRYING TO SHOW THAT HE HAD UNDERSTOOD AND SYMPATHIZED WITH THE U.S. IN ITS DIFFICULTY, EVEN THOUGH THAT DIFFICULTY WAS OF OUR OWN MAKING. AT THIS POINT NE WIN DIGRESSED INTO A FAMILIAR THEME, THAT HO CHI MINH WAS A VIETNAMESE NATIONALIST, NOT A COMMUNIST, AT LEAST NOT TO START WITH. "BY THE WAY," HE ADDED, "THE CHINESE ARE ALSO CHINESE FIRST, COMMUNIST SECOND...AND THE SAME THING CAN BE SAID OF THE RUSSIANS.") AT THE END OF OUR MEETING, NE WIN SAID HE ADMIRERED PRESIDENT CARTER AND THAT HE HOPED TO MEET HIM SOMETIME. I REPLIED THAT, AS INDICATED BY THE WHITE HOUSE LETTERS, TO WHICH I HAD REFERRED EARLIER, PRESIDENT CARTER HAD THE HIGHEST REGARD FOR PRESIDENT NE WIN, AND PARTICULARLY ADMIRERED HIS VIGOROUS CONDUCT OF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE NARCOTICS TRAFFIC. OSBORN

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